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# Effects of a preschool bilingual family literacy programme

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**Abstract** This article reports a multi-method evaluation of a one-year small-scale preschool family literacy programme with bilingual Pakistani-origin families in the UK. The programme was implemented mostly through home visits and included provision of literacy resources, some postal communication and group meetings. The study was conducted in collaboration with the Sheffield REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) project. Take-up and participation were high (with significant involvement of older siblings) and no families dropped-out. Families' views, obtained through interviews at the beginning and end of the programme, were extremely positive in terms of increased understanding of how to support their children's literacy development, impact on their confidence and literacy achievements, and how they valued the programme. Outcomes for children showed significant gains over a control group. The family literacy programme was found to be both feasible and effective.

**Keywords** bilingual; family; literacy; parents; preschool

## Introduction

Although there have been many studies of preschool family literacy programmes, there has been relatively little research into those for bilingual families (Hannon, 2003). The study reported here explored how a school can collaborate with families to enhance the literacy development of preschool children in the case of Pakistani-origin bilingual families in an inner-city community in the north of England. A family literacy programme was developed, implemented and then evaluated in relation to take-up,

participation and drop-out, the programme teacher's reflections, the views of mothers, and changes in measures of children's literacy development compared to those of children in a control group. Interviews with mothers pre-programme, explored their views on why they chose to take part and their expectations of the programme. Pre-programme family literacy activities were also noted. Post-programme interviews enabled assessment of the impact of the programme on family literacy and mothers' views of the programme.

Appreciation of the importance of literacy acquisition crosses many cultural boundaries and is seen by many as a means by which people can more fully participate in the literate societies of the 21st century (Auerbach, 1989; Blackledge, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Gregory and Williams, 2000). The sociocultural perspective on literacy learning, exemplified by Goodman (1980), who has referred to 'the roots of literacy', and Teale and Sulzby (1986) and Hall (1987), who have used the term 'emergent literacy', values informal literacy practices in the home and community such as writing greeting cards, shopping lists, reading television pages and values informal learning in purposive social situations. It is clear that not all literacy is learnt in school. In the home many young children are exposed, informally, to written language and its uses from birth, although there may be varying degrees to which parents become involved in their child's own literacy development (Weinberger, 1996). Many studies have researched the effect of parental intervention (Hannon, 1995). Baghban (1984), Bissex (1980), and Schickedanz (1990) studied the effect on individual children while Heath (1983) studied family literacy in the homes of communities in the Carolinas.

Increasingly, the development of early literacy is being conceptualized as embedded in social and cultural practices (Auerbach, 1995; Crozier and Davies 2006; Feiler 2005; Moll and González, 1994; Purcell-Gates 2007). Learning to become literate is not 'just' a matter of acquiring certain skills but is also about participating in cultural practices of the home and community. The importance of the home in developing literacy practices is increasingly recognized as key (Anderson, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Parke et al., 2002). Parents are key in enhancing children's literacy development (Edwards, 1993; Edwards et al., 1999; Greenhough and Hughes, 1999; Hannon, 1995). The influence of the home is important for all children, but for those who have multilingual experiences at home there is an even greater need for educators to be aware of home and community literacy experiences and the culture of the family (Auerbach, 1995; Duke and Purcell-Gates, 2003; Gillanders and Jiménez, 2004, Jordan et al., 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2007). Recent studies and documentation of practice

demonstrate how literacy can be taught more effectively by making use of all the languages of pupils, rather than focusing on English alone (Conteh, 2006; Kenner, 2004; Zentella, 1997). Increasingly there is interest in the role of siblings and other family members in home literacy learning (Dyson, 2002; Gregory, 1998, 2001; Gregory and Williams, 2000).

Despite this range of research, interest in young bilingual children's developing literacy and the roles of their families and communities in supporting their development, there remain gaps in our knowledge. The study reported here is apparently the first to evaluate the effects on young children's literacy of a family literacy programme with Pakistani-origin bilingual families. The programme was broadly similar to that used by the REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) project, reported by Nutbrown et al. (2005). It used a framework for preschool intervention (ORIM) of providing 'opportunities', 'recognition' by parents of their children's achievements, 'interaction' by parents and practitioners, and 'models' of literacy, to be explained later.

The bilingual programme was implemented in the children's home language (Mirpuri Punjabi) and English, and in some cases, Urdu. (The Mirpuri Punjabi dialect of the rural areas of Pakistan, spoken by many families in this study, is rarely encountered in a written form.) The aim was to support children's literacy development, that is their knowledge, skills, understanding and enjoyment in reading, writing and key aspects of oral language. There was no privileging of one language over another in the implementation of the programme. Bilingual approaches were used in whichever combination was appropriate for the children, with the children often taking the lead in deciding which language was used at any point. Similarly, parents chose to speak in whichever language they wished to use and bilingual support facilitated this. The programme was not designed to promote literacy only in English, or only in any one language. It was to support the development of early literacy development through English, through Urdu and through Mirpuri Punjabi – the use of a range of languages being the means by which that development of literacy was promoted. Thus, reported outcomes for children are outcomes in literacy knowledge, skills and understanding and not outcomes in the literacy of a particular language. Previous research in the community where the study took place (Hirst, 1998) suggested that families would welcome home/school collaboration. Hirst's survey of family literacy in the homes of 30 preschool Pakistani children found that there was some preschool literacy activity in all homes and parents had high aspirations for their children's education. This suggested that a programme to work with

families to build on young children's learning in the home and the community would be appropriate. This article reports the implementation and evaluation of such a programme.

### **Research setting: The school and the community**

The study took place in an inner-city Pakistani community in the north of England. The school was situated in a mixed residential area that included 19th-century stone and brick-built terraced and detached houses with some 20th-century semi-detached houses. There was a maze of streets containing high-density terraced housing. The area housed white British middle and working-class families as well as a small number of African Caribbean families and a large number of families of Pakistani origin, many of whom were related. Children in the area attended a large 100-year-old stone-built school for children aged 3–11 years. Eighty percent of the children were of Pakistani origin and 38 percent were eligible for free school meals (an indicator that these families were considered to be on low income and entitled to state benefits). Further details of the families are reported later. The school was on a busy arterial road lined with shops selling Asian food, fabrics, craft materials and videos. The two local mosques were about half a mile away and the school dining room was also used as a 'school mosque' each day. Muslim children in the school attended one of the three mosques and attended Qu'ranic classes after school.

### **Rationale and research questions**

Certain features distinguished the families in this study from those in many other early literacy studies. These included multilingualism in the home, writing systems, religion and gender. Young children of Pakistani-origin may be exposed to as many as four languages: Mirpuri Punjabi, Urdu, Qu'ranic Arabic and English. Families may use different writing systems, for example, Urdu, Qu'ranic Arabic and English. Islam is an important part of the culture in many Pakistani families and therefore influences their lifestyle. There is a desire to learn to read Qu'ranic Arabic to enable participation in the religious ceremonies and prayers both at home and at the mosque. Most Pakistani children attend Qu'ranic classes either at the mosque or in a neighbor's home. Traditionally there have been low academic expectations in some communities for girls but this now appears to be changing.

The study addressed two research questions:

1. To what extent is it feasible to develop and implement a bilingual family literacy programme with Pakistani-origin families before children enter school?
2. What is the value of such a programme in terms of children's literacy outcomes and parents' views?

This article reports the development, implementation and evaluation of a programme.

## Methodology

### Collaboration with the Sheffield REAL Project

The study was undertaken in collaboration with the Sheffield REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) project, which developed a family literacy programme and evaluated it by a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including a randomized controlled trial (RCT). REAL project teachers worked in the home with parents of the programme group children for 12–18 months before school entry at age 5. The bilingual study followed the same basic approach as the rest of the REAL Project, including random selection and allocation to programme and control groups. There were two differences. First, the programme ran over a 12-month period (instead of 18 months) so visits and activities were fit into a shorter period of time. Second, the programme sought specifically to acknowledge and respect the Pakistani-origin families' culture, religion, languages and writing systems by, for example, using bilingual books, arranging visits so that prayer times and festivals were not interrupted, and including and embracing children's experience of mosque and mosque schools.

### Ethical issues

The study raised ethical issues. Critics of random allocation argue that studies which offer something believed to be good to one group and not to another are unfair, unethical or even immoral. Our response to this was threefold. First, it was *believed* that working with parents, using the methods in the study, would make a difference to children's early literacy development – believed but it was not *known*. A study was needed to demonstrate the efficacy of such methods of working and to generate evidence that might be used in the future to influence policy, practice and professional development. Second, *nothing* was taken away from *any* child or family – all the children had their usual home and preschool/school experiences. It was only because of the study that some children – who were selected at

random – participated in the programme. Third, where there is the potential to demonstrate that programmes might be beneficial, not to carry out a randomized control trial (RCT) to generate the necessary evidence to demonstrate its effect could also be ethically questionable.

One possibility might have been to offer a ‘delayed treatment’ to the control group – giving families in the control group an opportunity to participate after the RCT was over. This was not possible due to limited resources and also, crucially, because by the time the study was complete children had entered full-time school and were of an age where a preschool programme would have been inappropriate.

Other ethical issues – anonymity, informed consent, well-being of participants – were attended to throughout the study. Decisions whether to change participants’ names were taken with each individual. All families had clear details of the programme, their commitment, and their right to withdraw at any point. At all times the programme teacher and bilingual assistant put the well-being of families before the interests of the study.

### **Selection of children and allocation to programme and control groups**

In line with selection procedures used in the REAL project, 16 Pakistani-origin 3-year-old children (8 boys and 8 girls) were selected at random from the preschool register. All children were assessed using the Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile (SELDP) (Nutbrown, 1997). From the 16 children, 8 pairs of children were formed on the basis, first, of same gender, then on closeness of ages, and finally on closeness of SELDP scores. From each pair, one child was allocated at random (by the toss of a coin) to the programme group and one to the control group. The rows in Table 1 show the pairs and group allocation.

As can be seen from Table 1, the outcome of the allocation process was two groups of children very similar in terms of gender, age and mean SELDP scores.

### **Gaining access to families**

The first author (KH) was the programme teacher. She had previously taught in the school’s preschool unit and was known to some of the families in the community and school staff. Having gained permission from the headteacher, and in consultation with the preschool teacher, families were approached through the preschool with the aid of a bilingual assistant who later assisted the study as an interpreter. After selection of 16 families with children in the target age range, parents were asked if they would be willing to take part in a study. All parents were asked if they were prepared to be

Table 1 Pre-programme scores

<i>Programme group</i>				<i>Control group</i>			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age (in months)</i>	<i>SELDP score</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age (in months)</i>	<i>SELDP score</i>
1	F	46	19.5	9	F	46	22.0
2	F	44	24.5	10	F	45	26.0
3	F	43	21.0	11	F	43	26.5
4	F	43	19.0	12	F	43	22.5
5	M	45	26.5	13	M	45	32.0
6	M	45	22.0	14	M	45	19.0
7	M	44	13.5	15	M	43	13.5
8	M	41	21.0	16	M	40	16.0
Means		43.8	20.9			43.8	22.2

interviewed to establish literacy practices that were taking place in the home and allow their child to be assessed using a literacy assessment profile at the beginning and end of the programme period (again with complete freedom to withdraw at any time). Those allocated at random to the programme were asked if they would be prepared to participate in a 12-month home visiting programme on the understanding that they could withdraw at any time, working with the teacher and the bilingual assistant to enhance their understanding of their young child's literacy development. The invitation was given in writing in both English and Urdu.

### **Take-up, participation, stop-out and drop-out**

Take-up (the number of families invited who accept the invitation) is an important part of the evaluation of any programme but is not always reported. In this study take-up was measured as the proportion of those invited to join the programme who actually did so. Participation (the degree to which families were involved) and drop-out (families leaving the programme before it was completed) were determined from programme records. Note was also taken of 'stop-out' (temporary withdrawal from the programme).

### **Assessment of children's literacy**

Children's literacy development was assessed pre-programme and post-programme using the SELDP (Nutbrown, 1997), which assesses children's knowledge of environmental print, books, writing and letter recognition on a 60-point scale. The assessor asks children to engage in realistic and



meaningful literacy tasks, which include identifying print on household packaging, telling a story from pictures in a book, writing to a teddy bear. The profile is appropriate for children aged three to five years and was therefore suitable for pre- and post-programme testing. Population norms were not available for this measure but were not required as it was used only for comparisons within the study sample (pre-programme/post-programme, programme/control). Children were assessed jointly by the teacher and bilingual assistant in their preferred language, with the bilingual assistant interpreting as necessary. Children replied orally in whichever language they preferred.

### **The programme families**

Some children lived in relatively small nuclear families while others were in more extended families. Table 2 shows how the number of persons in the household varied from four to nine.

All the children had siblings. Four children were the youngest in their families while four had both older and younger siblings. All the fathers, and one of the mothers, were in employment.

### **Working with programme families**

The programme was based on the ORIM framework (Hannon and Nutbrown, 1997) and aimed to promote parents' awareness of how they could help to enhance their preschool child's reading, writing and related oral language (see Figure 1) by providing opportunities for their child's literacy development, recognizing their child's achievements, interacting with their child and being models of literacy users. The bilingual assistant worked alongside the programme teacher.

### **Parent interviews**

Parents' views of their experiences and participation in the family literacy programme were obtained through interviews carried out by the programme teacher assisted by the bilingual assistant. Most of the older siblings who participated in the programme were not interviewed. In one case, however, because the older sibling had had a leading role in her family's participation, she was interviewed with her mother. By adopting a bilingual approach it was hoped that the views of participants would be more fully represented. The parent interview schedule was adapted from that used by Hannon et al. (2006) to take account of cultural and bilingual issues. Resources did not permit the employment of independent interviewers. The risk that parents would tell the programme teacher and her bilingual colleague what they thought they would like to hear was

*Table 2* The programme families: Members of households and parents' occupations

<i>Child's ID and gender</i>	<i>Children in family</i>	<i>Position in family</i>	<i>Others in household in addition to both parents</i>	<i>Total in household</i>	<i>Father's employment</i>	<i>Mother's employment</i>
1 F	2	2		4	Foundry worker	None
2 F	3	2		5	Taxi driver	None
3 F	6	6		8	Taxi driver	Sewing machinist working from home
4 F	5	3	Paternal grandparents	9	Taxi driver	None
5 M	3	3		5	Cutler	None
6 M	7	7		9	Taxi driver	None
7 M	3	3		5	Cook	None
8 M	4	3	Paternal grandmother	7	Lecturer in engineering	None

considered to be offset by the likelihood that the relationships established during the programme would permit more honest responses than would be given to a stranger – indeed, a stranger may not have gained access to the families.

### **Programme teacher's journal**

The programme teacher kept a journal that included records of home visits and group meetings throughout the duration of the programme. Entries documented how parents responded to the programme, their comments, and the teacher's observations of the children and their parents engaged in literacy activities. Coverage of the ORIM framework, plans for, and records of, home visits were also noted. Records were used to ascertain the number of home visits, books borrowed, group meetings attended and to identify key themes and aspects of parents and children's literacy practices and responses to the programme.

### **The family literacy programme**

The 12-month programme was based closely on that of the REAL project (for details of content and practices, see Nutbrown et al., 2005) but with significant modifications to take account of the community in which it was implemented. It began with home visits and provision of literacy resources, followed by postal contacts and group activities. Once relationships were established with the families, group activities were introduced. Visits focused on the four strands of literacy identified in the ORIM framework (Figure 1): books, early writing, environmental print and key aspects of oral language. Group activities were not introduced until the programme teacher felt the families were ready.

### **Home visits by the programme teacher and the bilingual assistant**

Home visits were arranged with the families at approximately three-weekly intervals until children began mainstream school full time, just before their fifth birthday. Each visit focused on one or more of the literacy strands identified in Figure 1 (books, environmental print, early writing or oral language) but was flexible in adapting to the child's interests during the visit. Parents, mostly mothers or on occasions, because they were present, older siblings, were encouraged to participate in the activity. Ideas for follow-up activities were given. Each visit started with a review of any literacy activities the family had been engaged in since the previous visit.

**Strands of early literacy development**

		Environmental print	Books	Early writing	Oral language
Families can provide	Opportunities				
	Recognition				
	Interaction				
	Model				

Figure 1 **The ORIM framework**  
 Source: Nutbrown et al. (2005).

The following extract is taken from the teacher’s journal after her first visit (with Shaheen, the bilingual assistant) to Adnan and his family:

This was the first visit Shaheen and I made to this family. There were three children in the family, Roseena (8-year-old girl), Waheed (6-year-old boy) and Adnan, the 3-year-old project child. The home language was Punjabi. The children and their father spoke fluent English. The mother also spoke English but was not as confident as the rest of the family. Shaheen knew the family well and I had met the mother when the middle child was in preschool. The visit was made at the end of the school day.

The focus of the visit was to discuss the project and to establish a friendly working relationship with an introductory focus on book sharing and opportunity for mark-making or drawing if Adnan so wished. As we entered the living room the two older children were sitting on the settee eagerly awaiting our visit. Adnan was clinging to mum and was very shy. We were made to feel very welcome. We exchanged pleasantries and

discussed the family's celebration of Eid, which had just taken place. I took a soft toy 'Spot the dog', and a book about Spot from my bag. I read the story and all three children listened with interest. Adnan cuddled the toy but did not leave his mother's side. Shaheen then read a story that featured an Asian family and the youngest child starting preschool. Mum said she did not read English but was learning to read Urdu. I suggested that both stories we had read could be shared with Adnan by talking about the pictures. Much to Adnan's delight, Mum took the book about the Asian family and immediately shared it with Adnan in Punjabi. I said I would bring some children's books next time that were written in both Urdu and English. Mum was pleased about that as she said that as well as helping Adnan it may also help her to read Urdu. Roseena picked up the Spot book and started to read it. Adnan moved over to her to listen. We left both books with the family with mark-making materials and paper. Mum said both she and the family would look at the books with Adnan and encourage Adnan to use the crayons, pencil and paper.

### **Aspects of the ORIM Framework covered in this visit**

*Opportunities* for book sharing were offered by the home visitors, the mother and Roseena, the older sister.

*Recognition* by the mother of ways she could share a book with Adnan and of his pleasure in her participation.

*Interaction* by the mother and the older sibling in book sharing.

*Model.* The mother was providing a model of sharing books through oral language and the older sister provided a model as a reader.

### **Provision of literacy resources**

Each child was given a book bag containing writing materials, paper, scissors and glue at the beginning of the project and these were replenished as necessary. Children usually produced their bags at the start of each visit. Books were loaned on each visit and the parent and child were supported in choosing books, several of which were dual language, Urdu/English. Picture books enabled parents with few literacy skills to look at the books and talk with their children about the pictures. Other resources included familiar toys and materials from toyshops, supermarkets and local shops, such as magnetic letters, nursery rhyme snap cards and scissors, glue, fabric and paper to make puppets and homemade games. The aim was to provide resources that were easily available for parents to buy or to gather together from things they had in the home – not to loan equipment that was difficult for families to obtain for themselves. The home visitors acted as models of literacy users during the visits – engaging the children and at the

same time sharing ideas with parents about how the resources could be used.

### **Postal contact**

It was decided to keep contact with parents and children mostly through face-to-face contact at preschool or over the telephone. Postal contacts, however, were also used for the following purposes: to respond to a request to change a visit if the parent could not be contacted at preschool or over the telephone; to maintain contact during school holidays; and to convey the concepts of environmental print and writing for a purpose to the child and parent.

### **Group meetings**

There were four group meetings spread over the 12-month duration of the programme as follows:

- Month 4: Discussion of parents' roles in providing opportunities, recognition, interaction and models of literacy using extracts from video material (Nutbrown et al., 1997) showing families from many different cultures using a variety of languages to engage their children in home literacy activities
- Month 6: Environmental print walk in local park
- Month 9: Sharing books and writing (meeting in school)
- Month 10: Environmental print/oral language (meeting in school)

These were attended by mothers who did not have experience of attending meetings in school. So, by way of transition, the first two group sessions were held in less institutional, non-school venues. The first group meeting was held at the home of the programme teacher and the environmental print walk was arranged in the local park. On both occasions transport was provided. There were usually no older siblings present at the meetings but one older sister did go on the print walk.

### **Creating relationships and building confidence**

The programme started with home visits just after Eid, the festival marking the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting, so discussion of the religious celebration was a good talking point in all the families. At the beginning of each subsequent session, time was allowed to exchange news and to review which literacy activities the child and family had been involved in between visits. Children varied in their confidence. The

programme teacher had assessed the children in preschool, but was not well known to them. The bilingual assistant also worked in the preschool class in the school and, even though the children knew her well, four out of eight children were extremely shy at first, possibly because of the different circumstances in which they met her. One girl spoke only three words on the first visit to name her drawings. A boy took up to four visits before he fully joined in. Although he was very interested in observing the materials and activities from a distance and his older brother and sister were in the room as well as his mother, his shyness overcame him. As the programme progressed he gained confidence and fully participated.

### **Working bilingually with families**

The role of the bilingual assistant in the programme was essential. She acted as interpreter, communicated with the children and parents in their preferred language and scribed children's words in Urdu. She also contributed to the activities bilingually and translated letters into Urdu where necessary.

The approach to the families was informed by some awareness of home and community literacy and the culture of families derived from a previous study in the community (Hirst, 1998), by some informal investigations (e.g. visits to three mosque schools, Hirst, 2001) and by close collaboration with the bilingual assistant. In practical terms this meant an openness to working in languages other than English, a valuing of scripts other than roman, recognition of emergent writing in non-roman scripts, making use of environmental print in Urdu and Arabic, appreciation of the role of literacy in religious and cultural practices, and a confidence that parents did value literacy in English as well as in other languages.

Initially some mothers felt they had little to offer due to what they felt were their limited skills in English. They appeared pleased to hear how the programme staff acknowledged that their literacy in another language was important and how they could offer opportunities, interaction, recognition of their child's achievements and act as a model of literacy to their child through their own literacy activities. They also realized that their knowledge of English was greater than they thought when they went on an environmental print walk. Throughout the programme, the importance of the bilingual role of the family in young children's literacy development was reinforced.

## Main findings

### Take-up

There was 100 percent take-up by the eight families who were invited to take part in a programme. Parents were therefore indicating their willingness to collaborate with educators to enhance their child's literacy development and indicating that they saw potential value in the programme. This mirrored the finding of the REAL Project (Hannon et al., 2005).

When asked why they had agreed to participate, all mothers said they thought the programme would help the child and/or the family, saying, for example:

I thought he would learn about reading and writing and we in the family would learn more how to help him too.

### Drop-out and stop-out

None of the families dropped out of the programme. Such commitment to the programme appeared to indicate that parents valued it highly. Many seemed disappointed to see the programme end and two had indicated that they would like it to continue when children were in school. Two mothers would have liked a similar programme for their older primary children. Again, this mirrors the participation levels of the REAL project (Hannon et al., 2006).

Two mothers needed to 'stop-out' of the programme for a while, i.e. to cease for a short time and re-enter. In both cases, the latter stages of pregnancy and birth of a child caused a 'stop-out' of 6–8 weeks. One of those families also had the disruption of extensive external and internal house repairs. Both mothers returned to the programme when their domestic circumstances settled down, which again showed their willingness to be involved in the programme.

### Families' involvement in the project

Table 3 shows the number of visits, postal contacts, the number of group meetings in school attended by the mothers and those families which 'stopped-out' for a short period (affecting the number of meetings in which they took part but not necessarily the number of home visits).

As in any project that involves working with families, problems arose that meant visits had to be rearranged. These included bereavement, birth, major house refurbishment, illness and hospital visits. However, all mothers were eager not to miss visits entirely and arranged a more convenient date for visits. The postal contacts mainly involved communication during the school holidays as reported earlier. The low attendance at group meetings



**Table 3** Number of home visits, postal contacts, attendance at group meetings and families where there was 'stop-out'

<i>ID/gender</i>	<i>Home visits</i>	<i>Postal contacts</i>	<i>Group meetings attended (max 4)</i>	<i>'Stopped-out'</i>
1 F	14	3	3	
2 F	9	3	4	
3 F	13	3	2	
4 F	9	3	1	Yes
5 M	14	3	3	
6 M	10	3	4	
7 M	10	3	4	
8 M	14	3	2	Yes

of some mothers was due to one having to work from home and the two who were pregnant attending occasionally. One family attended only one session suggesting, again, the effectiveness of home visiting as a way of working with families. Patterns of involvement were broadly similar to those of the REAL project where some families only attended one meeting but did not miss their home visits.

### Participation levels

Participation was rated on a five-point scale by the programme teacher and varied in extent and nature. As can be seen from Table 4, most families had a high rate of participation. The teacher's rating was based on observations and reported involvement by families between visits and where appropriate, supported by evidence (e.g. the production of a piece of writing). Table 4 shows the participation levels of families and the definition of those levels.

Participation of families meant the participation of a wide range of family members – parents, at least one grandparent, siblings (from young siblings aged 2 who were involved to some degree in activities or book sharing, through to siblings aged 6–19 years who supported the child). Older siblings included seven girls in six different families and three brothers in three different families. In one family, the 14-year-old sister, Samaira was present at most home visits while her mother worked in the home as a sewing machinist making umbrella covers for a local manufacturer; the mother was involved between visits. Samaira's involvement was key, as the following extract from the teacher's journal illustrates:

Tasmin (four years of age) was the youngest of seven children, the next youngest being 14 year old Samaira. Samaira was involved in all the home visits and also between visits. She read stories and encouraged Tasmin to look at the

Table 4 Participation levels of programme families and older siblings

ID	Level of participation					Older siblings participating
	1	2	3	4	5	
1				◆		1 (sister age 8)
2					◆	1 (sister age 8)
3					◆	2 (sisters aged 14 and 19)
4		◆				None
5				◆		2 (sister age 8, brother age 6)
6				◆		1 (sister age 16)
7				◆		1 (brother age 12)
8					◆	2 (sister age 10, brother age 12)

*Notes:* Participation levels (1 = low participation, 5 = high participation): (1) No participation by families either during or between visits. (Families welcomed the home visitors but did not engage in any literacy activities. Home visitors were sole participants with the children.); (2) Minimal participation by families. (Families welcomed the home visitors and participated to some extent.); (3) Participation by families during visits but none between. (Families welcomed the visits and took part during the visit but did not do follow up activities.); (4) Participation by families both during and sometimes between visits. (Families welcomed the visits and engaged in literacy during and sometimes between visits.); (5) Full participation by families both during and between visits. (Families welcomed visits, took part in all activities during and between visits, and were proactive in developing literacy activities of their own which they shared with the home visitors.)

*Source:* Nutbrown et al. (2005).

pictures and retell the story. She encouraged her mark making and acted as scribe. On one occasion, of her own initiative, Samaira showed us how she had made a book for Tasmin. In English, she had written 'When I was a baby I was in a pram. Now I am 4. These are good for me . . . (she had drawn and written fish fingers, bananas apples). These are not good for me . . . (she had drawn and written sweets). She also encouraged Tasmin's emergent writing in English, Urdu and Arabic.

I had loaned Tasmin a pack of nursery rhyme snap cards and nursery rhyme tapes, and Samaira later told us how Tasmin had learnt many of the rhymes. Tasmin was delighted to say the ones she had learnt. Samaira told us she had listened to the tapes in the car and she had read the cards to Tasmin. (Shaheen told me she was not aware of any children's rhymes and songs in Punjabi. She thought that was one of the reasons children enjoyed learning them in English.)

Samaira also shared the notebook of follow-up activities with her teenage siblings. Her 19-year-old sister would also read to her and had spelt out Tasmin's name on the fridge with magnetic letters.

Although the mothers were generally the main participants, others contributing to the children's literacy included: five fathers (one minimally), one grandparent and 10 older siblings (10 girls and 3 boys). Although the programme began by focusing on involving parents, and involvement of siblings and grandparents was not part of the original plan, the ethos of the programme was one of 'fitting' with families. Therefore it was appropriate to encourage sibling involvement where they showed interest. It is a finding of this study that extended-family participation was diverse, a feature not noted by Nutbrown et al. (2005).

### **Families' views of the programme**

When interviewed about the value of the programme, all mothers offered very positive comments such as:

We learned different things with the project. It was good. It was enjoyable.

She asks me every day, 'Is my teacher coming?'

One mother was very appreciative of the ideas and support offered by the programme teacher. She said:

I admire your work. You always brought something for him to do and then I got ideas. It's been very, very helpful.

All mothers said they enjoyed their participation in the programme. When asked what it was like having a teacher visit at home, they all expressed appreciation and some added:

It was good. I liked it. I didn't want to go in school at first. [This mother later attended most of the group meetings.]

I was very happy for you to come to our house and what we did with her made her more interested in wanting to do things.

One mother explained how she worked more with her younger daughter due to the visits.

It made me tend to work with my younger daughter. With my older daughter, sometimes we wouldn't do anything at all but with her we've been doing something every week.

### **All the mothers**

When asked whether they felt the things they were involved in were too much like school, all the mothers replied, 'no'. When asked whether they had experienced the programme as a pressure, all the mothers replied, 'no'. When asked what made them stay involved in a year-long programme, all eight mothers had positive comments.

The work you've been doing . . . the things that you've left me, and looking forward to the next visit. She liked you coming.

It was so nice. I was very upset when you stopped coming.

One teenage sister was determined to involve her other teenage siblings also. Referring to a notebook in which suggestions were made for follow-up activities after a home visit, she said:

I liked showing the notebook to all of them (other teenage siblings) so that they could all help.

In one family, in addition to the programme child, the two older siblings (aged six and eight years) were very involved in each visit. Their mother had this to say when the programme had ended:

All three children looked forward to your visits. You always brought something interesting and we learnt a lot.

Another mother compared a family literacy home-visiting programme to children being in school:

In school they just work with the children but at home you helped us to understand how to work with our children.

When asked the best thing about the programme, all mothers said 'everything' was good. Some mothers added:

It's helped me a lot.

He learns so many things about reading and writing. I learnt too. I enjoyed you both coming.

We were involved in everything.

All mothers were in favor of the programme being offered to all families. As one parent said:

It's helping families how to help their children.

When asked how other families might benefit from the programme, all mothers had something to say, including:

All the family got something from it and it helped him a lot with reading and playing games.

She didn't do anything before. It's made it easier for her to go to school. She's settled really well and she likes it. It was hard for (older daughter) when she went – she didn't like it.

None of the mothers felt the programme was too much like school and none felt the project was a pressure. Overall, mothers' views on participation in the project were highly positive.

### **Mothers' views of outcomes for children's literacy**

All mothers believed that the programme had helped their child. One mother reported how it had helped her child's communication skills as well as enhancing other areas of literacy. She said:

[It's helped her] communication, she was very quiet, now she talks a lot. She's learnt a lot about writing and looking at books.

A teenage sister reported:

It's helped her a lot with reading, looking at pictures, learning rhymes and letters. It's helped her a lot with her English. Mum doesn't understand a lot of English.

Although this young child's literacy development had been enhanced, it was likely that she would use English far more than Mirpuri Punjabi as her older sisters and brothers communicated most of the time in English except when they were talking to their mother. One mother reported:

It's been good. He's learnt a lot about reading and writing.

Mothers therefore believed that the programme had enhanced their children's literacy development.

### **Mothers' views on the effects of the programme on interaction**

The following comments indicate mothers' views on the effects of the programme on their interaction with their child:

She never used to take much interest in books until I started reading more with her. I knew more what to do. I encouraged her with her writing.

We listened to the nursery rhyme tapes and video. I encouraged him to write and so did his older brother and sister. We shared the books much more. We learnt more about reading and writing different ways and how to handle the children. They all recorded themselves singing nursery rhymes.

Two mothers who had been educated in Pakistan said:

It was good especially for me because I haven't been to this kind of school here.

I understand more now. I and the family didn't do the things with my older son before because I didn't understand as much.

All mothers felt the family's role in their child's education was important and all were sufficiently aware to be able to explain to their child what use it was to be able to read and write.

### Effects on measures of children's literacy

Children's literacy achievements were assessed using the Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile (SELDP) (Nutbrown, 1997) at the start of the programme and at the end of the programme (just before children started full-time school). The post-programme scores on the SELDP at the end of the term before the children started full-time school are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows the higher scores for the programme group compared to the control group. At the start of the programme, children in each pair had similar scores (Table 1), whereas at the end all but one of the programme children clearly had the higher score. The mean score for the programme group was 36.3, appreciably higher than that of the control group (25.3). Although the sample size was small, the difference in scores between the groups was significant by the Mann-Whitney U test,  $p = 0.015$  (this despite the slightly higher mean pre-programme score for the control group reported in Table 1).

Another way to see the difference in scores is shown in the boxplot in Figure 2. The boxes represent the scores from the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile in each group, the line within each box represents the median score and the horizontal lines at the top and bottom of the whiskers represent the highest and lowest scores. (There were no outliers or extreme

Table 5 Post-programme scores

<i>Programme group</i>				<i>Control group</i>			
<i>ID</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age (in months)</i>	<i>SELDP score</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age (in months)</i>	<i>SELDP score</i>
1	F	59	36.0	9	F	58	28.0
2	F	57	54.0	10	F	57	29.5
3	F	56	44.0	11	F	55	19.5
4	F	56	24.5	12	F	56	21.5
5	M	57	30.5	13	M	57	36.5
6	M	57	29.5	14	M	58	21.0
7	M	57	29.0	15	M	60	20.5
8	M	57	43.0	16	M	56	25.5
Means		57.0	36.3			57.1	25.3

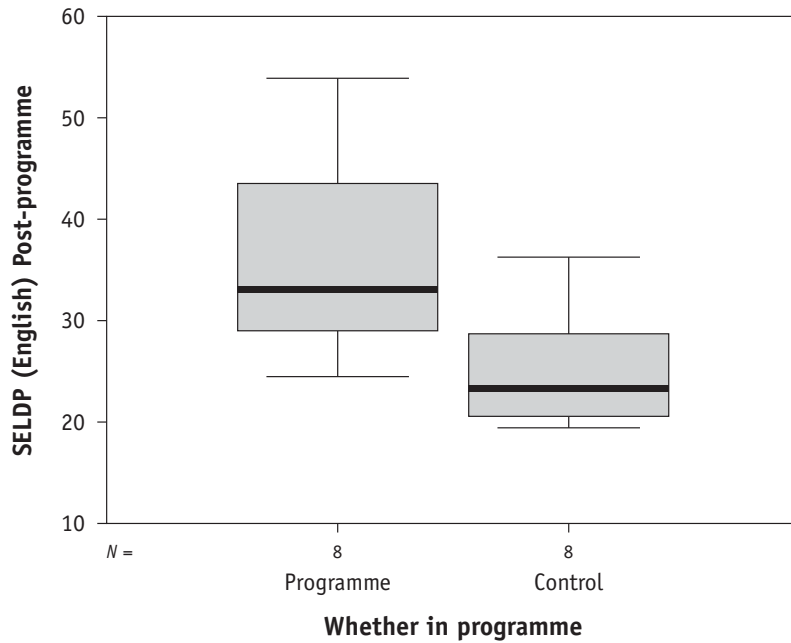


Figure 2 SELDP post-programme scores for each group

scores in either group so all 16 scores are represented in the plot.) Figure 2 presents a powerful picture of the gains made by the children in the programme group.

A further illustration of the impact on SELDP scores can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that, before the programme, the two groups of children were fairly evenly distributed across the 16 ranks. After the programme, the high rankings were mostly occupied by programme children with six programme children in the top eight (only three were in the top eight pre-programme).

## Discussion and conclusion

This article has reported the effects of a preschool bilingual family literacy programme which asked two questions:

1. To what extent is it feasible to develop and implement a bilingual family literacy programme with Pakistani-origin families before children enter school?

**Table 6 Ranking of programme (P) children and control (C) children according to SELDP scores before and after programme**

<i>Before programme</i>		<i>Rank</i>	<i>After programme</i>	
	C	1st	P	
P	C	2nd	P	
		3rd	P	
	C	4th		C
P		5th	P	
	C	6th	P	
P	C	7th	P	C
		8th		
P P		9th	P	
		10th		C
P		11th		C
P	C	12th	P	
		13th		C
	C	14th		C
P	C	15th		C
		16th		C

2. What is the value of such a programme in terms of children's literacy outcomes and parents' views?

The study has demonstrated the extent to which it is feasible to develop and implement a bilingual family literacy programme with preschool children in Pakistani-origin families. It has also shown that parents valued the programme and their children benefited significantly from it in terms of measures of literacy.

In gauging the significance of the study it is important to consider both the limitations and the strengths of the research design. Two possible factors that might be considered limitations are the small-scale nature of the study and the power position of the project teacher as researcher. Though small-scale, the programme effect in the study was strong. Therefore, the sample size was adequate with measures effectively determining programme-control differences. Because of her former role as a teacher in the local school, the programme teacher was possibly in what Delgado-Gaitan (1990) has referred to as a potentially intimidating power position. By working closely with a member of the local community, working at good relationships and developing mutual trust, this was minimized.

Two strengths of the study are its multi-method evaluation and its bilingual approach. The experimental design involved a random selection of



children from those in the target population and randomized allocation of children to the programme and control groups. This means that it is hard to attribute the considerable differences between the two groups at the end of the intervention period to anything other than the programme. As the programme did not teach children directly, differences in literacy development must be attributed to sociocultural changes in family literacy practices. The bilingual approach to the intervention, coupled with an appreciation of religious and sociocultural literacy practices in this community, and bilingual assessment made it possible to discover what children could do in literacy – whatever the language used.

A key finding from the study is that all programme families felt their involvement was beneficial for the child, and that the programme should be offered to all families with young children. As a result of the programme, families were further enabled to provide literacy opportunities, recognize their children's achievements, interact with their children and provide models of literacy.

Of interest, too, was the involvement of siblings in the programme. The extent of sibling involvement was remarkable adding further to the conclusion that the project benefited the children and was valued, not just by parents but by other family members.

Findings show that such a programme is feasible and the value was in:

- the enhanced literacy achievements of the programme children compared to the control group children.
- mothers' reported ability to contribute more effectively to their child's early literacy by building on what was already happening in the home.

This study is unique insofar as it is apparently the first to focus on and evaluate a programme of working with Pakistani-origin families in their homes to enhance their preschool children's literacy development. Previously there have either been evaluations of preschool family literacy programmes for monolingual families or reports of programmes for bilingual families that have not been fully evaluated. This study has made a contribution to understanding the aspirations and capacities of bilingual Pakistani-origin families in fostering their young children's literacy development. Bilingual family literacy work is not only feasible, but families respond positively and children's literacy development gains are significant.

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